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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3435  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 9927  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 5671  
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 4447  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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SENSITIVE  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PK](#)  
SUBJECT: JUNE 26 BY-ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 2209 (B) LAHORE 221

11. (SBU) Summary: Despite the June 23 decision by the Lahore High Court to declare Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif ineligible to run (reftels), Pakistan's June 26 by-elections will continue. The GOP June 25 petitioned the Supreme Court to overrule the decision against Nawaz and asked the Court to rule immediately as this was an issue of "national importance." The Court responded by delaying Nawaz's election. If Nawaz is allowed to contest, he will win a National Assembly seat. Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Zardari chose not to contest, and his sister will win Benazir's seat in Larkana. Aitzaz Ahsan chose to return his PPP ticket and continue leading the lawyers' movement. End Summary

12. (U) By-elections for seven National Assembly and 29 Provincial Assembly seats will be held June 26. Among the provincial assemblies, 16 seats will be contested in Punjab, three in Sindh, three in North Western Frontier Province and three in Balochistan. The election covers seats where the incumbent died (including Benazir Bhutto) and where a multiple winner in the February general election opted to fill another seat.

All in the Family  
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13. (SBU) Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Zardari's sister, Faryal Talpur, was elected unopposed on May 24 to fill Benazir Bhutto's seat in Larkana. Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif's brother, Shahbaz Sharif, was elected unopposed in the Punjab Provincial Assembly on May 24 and was sworn in as Chief Minister of Punjab. The Lahore High Court June 23 referred a case disputing Shahbaz's eligibility back to the Pakistan Election Commission (reftels).

14. (SBU) The GOP filed an appeal June 25 in the Supreme Court seeking to overturn the June 23 decision by the Lahore High Court that PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif is ineligible to run because of his conviction on corruption and kidnapping charges. The GOP asked the Supreme Court to rule immediately as this was an issue of "national importance." Prime Minister Gilani indicated June 24 that he would ask the Election Commission to postpone the election in Nawaz's district pending a court decision; the Court agreed June 25 to postpone the election.

15. (SBU) If Nawaz is allowed to contest, he is expected to win a seat representing Lahore. Nawaz's son-in-law, Captain (r) Muhammad Safdar, is contesting in Rawalpindi. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's brother, Makhdoom Mureed Hussain Qureshi, is running from Khanewal.

Missing in Action

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¶6. (SBU) Despite predictions that he would run, Zardari has opted to cede Benazir's seat to his sister and remain out of government. Some commentators have speculated that this will allow Zardari the freedom to continue business dealings and make frequent visits to his children in Dubai and the UK.

¶7. (SBU) Supreme Court Bar Association President Aitzaz Ahsan met May 18 with Zardari to return PPP's ticket. He stated that he preferred continuing to lead the lawyersQ movement rather than return to parliament. Ahsan chose not to contest the general elections in February for the same reason but the PPP had hoped to bring him back into the party's fold with the offer of a ticket.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: Six out of seven National Assembly constituencies are being contested in Punjab, which is increasingly becoming PML-NQs stronghold. In a recently released Terror Free Tomorrow poll, Nawaz's popularity rose to 86% with respondents reporting that if the election were held now, the PML-N would win 42% of the vote to the PPP's 32%. In the by-election, political commentators predict the PPP will win two National Assembly seats and the PML-N will win five. If the predictions come true, this would narrow the PPP's lead in the National Assembly and its control over the coalition government.

PATTERSON